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Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
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ROYAL TREATMENT: *Milo Thatch meets the daughter of the king, Princess Kida, in Disney's "Atlantis."*

ATLANTIS: THE LOST EMPIRE

(ANIMATED)

A Buena Vista release of a Walt Disney Pictures presentation. Produced by Don Hahn. Directed by Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise. Screenplay, Tab Murphy, story by Wise, Trousdale, Joss Whedon, Bryce Zabel, Jackie Zabel, Murphy. (Technicolor, CinemaScope); editor, Ellen Keneshea; music, James Newton Howard; art director, David Goetz; artistic coordinator, Christopher Jenkins; artistic supervisor for story, John Sanford; layout, Ed Ghertner; background, Lisa Keene; cleanup, Marshall Toomey; visual effects, Marlon West; computer graphics imagery, Kiran Bhakta Joshi; sound designer-supervisor (Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS), Gary Rydstrom; supervising sound editors, Michael Silvers, John K. Carr; associate producer, Kendra Haaland; casting, Ruth Lambert, Mary Hidalgo, Matthew Jon Beck. Reviewed at the Avco Cinema, L.A., June 2, 2001. MPAA Rating: PG. Running time: 95 MIN.

Voices:

Milo Thatch Michael J. Fox
Commander Rourke James Garner
Princess Kida Cree Summer
The King of Atlantis Leonard Nimoy
Vinny Santorini Don Novello
Helga Sinclair Claudia Christian
Audrey Ramirez Jacqueline Obradors

Preston B. Whitmore John Mahoney
Mole Corey Burton
Fenton
Q. Harcourt David Ogden Stiers
Cookie Jim Varney
Mrs. Packard Florence Stanley
Dr. Sweet Phil Morris

'ATLANTIS' LOST AT SEE

By TODD McCARTHY

Disney pushes into all-talking, no-singing, no-dancing and, in the end, no-fun animated territory with "Atlantis: The Lost Empire." This blandly conceived and executed attempt at a juve-style "Indiana Jones" with Jules Verne trappings recycles familiar adventure and cartoon devices with minimal wit and flair, and the lack of imagination will seem all the more dramatic to audiences in comparison to the winningly sophisticated "Shrek," against which "Atlantis" doesn't stand a chance at the box office. Rated PG but likely to be avoided by kids over 12 or so, and without many elements that will register as cool to younger kids, pic stands among the very least of Disney's major, non-TV-derived animated features.

FILM

Disney has long been moving closer to making a full-length cartoon without songs or anthropomorphized animal characters, and one can hope that they, and others, will continue to try. But the approach and style will have to be more striking and creative than they are in this picture, which departs from traditional Disney fare mostly through its pallid

New Agey concepts and visual motifs that remind by turns of Japanese *anime* and, horror of horrors, "Pokemon."

The enormously successful team of producer Don Hahn and directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise ("Beauty and the Beast," "The Hunchback of Notre Dame") and screenwriter Tab Murphy ("Hunchback," "Tarzan") revives the myth of Atlantis in a way that makes it smack of "Pocahontas," as a threatened paradise whose fate hinges upon the outcome of a romance between a native girl and a

Turn to page 23

Varcity 6/11-17/01 pp. 17; 23

ATLANTIS: THE LOST EMPIRE

Continued from page 17

sensitive explorer with mercenary companions.

It seems to take far longer than necessary to cover the expository basics that set up the journey of the learned but green Milo Thatch (voiced by Michael J. Fox) from his academic womb in Washington, D.C., to the under-oceanic world of Atlantis in 1914. The grandson of a legendary adventurer, Milo can read the ancient Atlantean language and is given the presumed sole copy of a text and guide to the lost continent by a nutty tycoon willing to finance a trip into the unknown. Better yet, he has already built and staffed a lavish submarine (reminiscent of those from "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea") that's ready to go.

The seriously multiethnic crew is led by the macho Commander Rourke (James Garner) and includes tough babe Helga (Claudia Christian), French Foreign Legion-type explosives expert Vinny Santorini (Don Novello), black medic Dr. Sweet (Phil Morris), Hispanic engineer Audrey Ramirez (Jacqueline Obradors), extendible-lens-eyed geologist Mole (Corey Burton), the chain-smoking Thelma Ritter-ish wisecracker Mrs. Packard (Florence Stanley) and cook Cookie (the late Jim Varney).

As the sub approaches the underwater passageway to Atlantis, team sets off in lifeboats to escape the clutches of a giant lobster monster that destroys the mother ship, and the survivors eventually make their way to their destination, a beautiful but somewhat forlorn paradise that resembles a run-down Shangri-La. The ancient king (Leonard Nimoy) would seem to be on his last legs, while his daughter and successor, the spirited Princess Kida (Cree Summer), worries for her future subjects. "Our people live, but our culture is dying," she laments to Milo, a rangy, bespectacled physical bumbler who takes more than an academic interest in the scantily clad maiden from down under.

The New Age element comes to the fore when Milo, exploring the island with Kida, learns the exciting news that Crystal Power provides the energy source for the continent. But it turns out that Rourke knows this too and plans to export the stuff, which also has exceptional healing properties, back to the mainland for maximum commercial gain. This, of course, will mean the death of Atlantis all over again, leading to a protracted struggle between Rourke and his hired guns on one side and Milo, Kida (who gets kidnapped) and their assorted loyalists on the other.

End result is an action sequence of some mild excitement, as ancient flying-fish craft are resurrected to chase down Rourke, but similar scenes in live-action features with the latest CGI work so eclipse this animated variation in terms of visceral impact and thrills that you have to wonder if it was really worth the trouble. Much the same could be said of the film as a whole.

Decision to use CinemaScope, as Disney previously did in animation on "Lady and the Tramp," "Sleeping Beauty" and "A Bug's Life," gives "Atlantis" a nice big canvas upon which to play out, if only there were some arresting compositions to enliven it. Vocal perfs are fine, with Novello getting the edge among the supporting thespians for his marvelously sardonic, world-weary delivery. James Newton Howard's score is a bit overblown.